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AUTHOR Long, Vonda Olson; Heggen, Carolyn Holderread
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ABSTRACT

Although the relationship that spiritual health and religious values might have to mental health has long been a focus of research, there is no research to date that has investigated actual perceptions of what constitutes spiritual health. A study was conducted to examine the perceptions of clergy on spiritual health as it pertains to the ideal for adults, adult males, and adult females. A questionnaire consisting of 62 bipolar items was given to active clergy (N=77) in New Mexico with one of three sets of instructions. Respondents indicated which of each set of characteristics listed on the questionnaire was most descriptive of a spiritually healthy: (1) adult, gender unspecified; (2) adult male; or (3) adult female. The results showed that judgments differed as a function of the gender of the person being judged. It was also found that spiritual health for males was not viewed as significantly different from ideal adult spiritual health, while spiritual health for females was viewed as significantly different from spiritual health for both adults and males. These findings have direct implications for counseling and represent an obvious dilemma for women who are in search of both spiritual and psychologcial health. A three-page list of references and two data tables conclude the document. (Author/NB)

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Clergy Perceptions of Spiritual Health for Adults, Men, and Women

by

Vonda Olson Long, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Counselor Education

and

Carolyn Holderread Heggen, M.A.

Department of Counselor Education

4020 Mesa Vista

University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131

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Clergy Perceptions of Spiritual Health

for Adults, Men, and Women

Submitted November 7, 1986

Author Notes

The authors wish to thank the clergy from New Mexico who, by their willing participation, made this study possible.

Abstract

A questionnaire consisting of 62 bipolar items was given to active clergy with one of three sets of instructions: To describe a spiritually healthy (a) adult, gender unspecified, (b) adult male, or (c) adult female, by indicating which of each set of characteristics listed on the questionnaire was most descriptive. Results showed that judgments differed as a function of the gender of the person being judged; and that spiritual health for males was not viewed as significantly different from ideal adult spiritual health, while spiritual health for females was viewed as significantly different from spiritual health for both adults and males.

Clergy Perceptions of Spiritual Health for Adults,

Men, and Women

(Running Head: Spiritual Health & Gender)

Differential sex-role expectations, together with differential standards of mental health for men and women in our society has long been established in the literature (Gilbert, 1981; Singer, 1976; Spence, Helmreich & Strapp, 1975). The landmark study by Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1970), indeed found that even mental health professionals held a double standard of mental health for men and women, with the male standard equivalent to their perception of the ideal standard for adults, while the female standard was significantly different. Since that time there has been an abundance of research suggesting that such a differential standard may well be detrimental to mental health--particularly for women whose sex-role conditioning is then in direct opposition to criteria for psychological health (Brodsky & Hare-Mustin, 1980; Clance & Imes, 1978; Sassen, 1980). While traditional gender-appropriate sex-roles have been previously associated with mental health, research over the past 15 years has suggested, first, that psychological androgyny, and later that the masculine component of androgyny, may well be the predictor of mental health for both men and women. Indeed, current research has consistently suggested that while

characteristics associated with traditional femininity appear to be unrelated to mental health, characteristics associated with traditional masculinity are predictive both of self-esteem and self-acceptance in women (Antill & Cunningham, 1980; Bassoff & Glass, 1979; Thomas & Reznikoff, 1984).

The relationship that spiritual health and religious values might have to mental health--particularly self-concept and self-esteem--has also long been a focus of research in our society (Benson & Spilka, 1973; London, Schulman & Black, 1964; Smith, Weigert & Thomas, 1979; Tipton, Harrison & Mahoney, 1980). Particular attention has been given to self-esteem in church women as related to differences in church doctrinairism regarding woman's role (Holcomb, 1974), and specifically, as related to dilemmas and contradictions women may experience in their quest to develop both spiritually and psychologically (Reeves, 1983).

While the implicit message has suggested contradictions and dilemmas regarding women's role in particular, there has been no research to date, that has investigated actual perceptions of what constitutes spiritual health, specifically as viewed by clergy. The present study investigates the perceptions of clergy on spiritual health as it pertains to the ideal for adults, adult males, and adult females.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for the study consisted of 77 (76 males, 1 female) currently active clergy from New Mexico, who responded to a questionnaire which had been mailed to 235 resident church pastors or priests. Marital status of the group included 57 married and 20 single; ethnicity consisted of 64 Caucasians, 11 Hispanics, 1 Native American and 1 Oriental. There were 42 pastors, 14 assistant pastors, 15 priests, 1 elder and 5 listing "other" as a title: and denominational affiliations were identified as 17 Roman Catholics, 18 Baptists, 23 Protestants (other than Baptist), 13 independents, 3 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and 3 Episcopalians. Age range included 5 in their 20's, 18 in their 30's, 19 in their 40's, 21 in their 50's, 9 in their 60's and 5 who were 70 or more. The majority of the group (n = 48) had seminary degrees with an additional 11 indicating some Bible School training or Bible School degree. The remainder held non-seminary degrees, including 5 high school diplomas, 8 Bachelor degrees, 2 Masters degrees, and 3 doctoral degrees.

Instrument

The authors developed a questionnaire which consisted of 62 bipolar descriptor items[1], each of which, using an adjective or short phrase, described a characteristic or

behavior. Items for the questionnaire were obtained by asking members of 6 different adult Bible classes from 3 different churches representing 3 different denominations to list adjectives or phrases to describe a spiritually healthy (a) adult, gender unspecified, (n = 39), (b) spiritually health adult male (n = 46), or (c) spiritually healthy adult female (n = 39). Items included on the questionnaire were chosen from those listed a minimum of 3 times.

Procedure

Questionnaires were mailed to active clergy of 235 churches randomly selected from a directory of churches in New Mexico. Subjects received a questionnaire with one of three sets of instructions: Indicate your perception of a spiritually health (a) adult (gender unspecified), (b) spiritually healthy adult male, or (c) spiritually healthy adult female, by checking only one of each set of terms listed below. They were asked to choose the one more descriptive and to make one choice on each set of items. Subjects were asked to complete and return the questionnaire anonymously, together with a demographic data form to obtain descriptive information on subjects' gender, marital status, age, ethnicity, educational level, denominational affiliation and present title in the church. Of those mailed 83 questionnaires were returned, of which 77 were complete and used in the study. Returned questionnaires included 27 describing a spiritually healthy adult (gender unspecified),

25 describing a spiritually healthy adult male, and 25 describing a spiritually healthy adult female.

Results

A one-way analysis of variance using Tukey's test for post hoc analysis was first employed to determine whether significant differences existed on demographic variables among the 3 groups of clergy describing a spiritually healthy adult, adult male, and adult female, respectively. A frequency tabulation was done on all descriptor items, separately for each of the 3 groups of clergy to develop a descriptive profile of perceived ideal spiritual health for adults, males and females, respectively. Finally, to determine whether significant differences existed between clergy perceptions of what constitutes a spiritually healthy adult (gender unspecified), spiritually healthy adult male, and spiritually healthy adult female, a one-way analysis of variance procedure was done using Tukey's post hoc analysis test for each of the 62 questionnaire items separately. A bonferroni alpha adjustment of .001 and .0001 comparison-wise was used to maintain an experiment-wise alpha at .05 and .01 respectively.

Results indicated no significant difference between the 3 groups of clergy on any demographic variable measured (gender, marital status, present title, age, education, denominational affiliation) with the exception of ethnicity,

where a significant difference was found between the group describing a spiritually healthy male and the group describing a spiritually healthy female, F (2, 76) = 3.22, $p < .05$.[2]

A frequency tabulation for each descriptor item resulted in descriptive profiles of clergy perceptions of spiritual health for adults, adult males and adult females as shown in Table 1. Only those items receiving at least 75% endorsement from all clergy in each respective group were included in the profiles. The respective profiles show that 13 of 17 items listed for males are the same as those listed for the ideal adult, while only 5 of 19 descriptors listed for females represent the ideal spiritually healthy adult.

Significant differences in clergy perceptions of spiritual health between gender groups are reported in Table 2 by descriptor item. Results indicated that clergy perceptions of what constitutes a spiritually healthy adult female differed significantly from their perceptions of what constituted both a spiritually healthy adult and a spiritually healthy adult male on 32 of the 62 descriptor items. In contrast, no significant differences were found between clergy perceptions of what constituted a spiritually healthy adult male and ideal adult spiritual health on any descriptor item. There were no significant differences found between any groups on the remaining 30 descriptor items.[3]

Discussion

It would appear that differential standards of spiritual health exist for men and women, as perceived by clergy, just as Broverman et.al. (1970) found that differential standards of mental health existed for men and women as perceived by mental health professionals. The descriptive profile of what constitutes spiritual health is significantly different depending upon the gender of the person being described. The findings also indicate that while substantial differences are seen between ideal spiritual health for adults and spiritual health for women, spiritual health for men is viewed as virtually identical to ideal spiritual health. Consequently, the findings suggest that not only are the profiles of spiritual health significantly different for men and women, but that the profile for men is the profile valued as the ideal.

These findings have direct implications for counseling and represent an obvious dilemma for women who are in search of both spiritual and psychological health. Women raised in or currently affiliated with churches with gender-based expectations for spiritual health and/or those receiving pastoral counseling may experience internal conflict as they find they cannot meet clergy's expectations and also embody characteristics which research has shown to be predictors of psychological health, (Long, 1986). The strong implications of this research are apparent for both pastoral and secular

counselors who work with such women, regarding the need to be aware of and sensitive to the dilemma these women may encounter. Clearly, a serious assessment of the potential effects that differential standards of spiritual health might have on the process of guiding and facilitating spiritual health and the development of psychological health in general is warranted.

To summarize, the following major results emerge from this study: (a) spiritual health is defined differently for adult men and women by clergy, (b) spiritual health for men is perceived to be equivalent to the ideal standards for adults, and (c) spiritual health for women is perceived by clergy to be significantly different from the ideal standard for adults.

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Footnotes

[1] Descriptor items are listed in Table 2 and footnote 3.

[2] In the group describing spiritually healthy adults, males and females, respectively, there were 23, 18, and 23 Caucasians; 3, 7, and 1 Hispanics; 1, 0, and 0 Native Americans; and 0, 0, and 1 Orientals.

[3] No significant difference was found between groups on the following descriptor items: analytical, willing to take risks, cooperative, self-sufficient, not concerned about physical appearance, obedient and yielding, offers help, focuses on career, values self above others, makes career top priority, looks within for spiritual direction, uses talents in church, self-sacrificial, critically examines theology and doctrines, childlike, emotional, intuitive, competitive, needs others, concerned about physical appearance, dominant, solicits help, focuses on relationships, values others above self, makes home top priority, looks to religious leader for direction, supports others' talents in church, not sacrificial, accepts theology and doctrines, sensitive and compassionate.

Table 1

Clergy Perceptions of Adult Spiritual Health by Gender[a]

Adult Ideal (n = 27)	Male (n = 25)	Female (n = 25)
Self-reliant	Self-reliant[b]	Seeks advice from others
Comfortable leading in church	Comfortable leading in church[b]	Comfortable following in church
Holds strongly to beliefs	Holds strongly to beliefs[b]	Cooperative[b]
Independent	Independent[b]	Obedient and yielding[b]
Aggressive	Aggressive[b]	Offers help[b]
Willing to take risks	Willing to take risks[b]	Gentle, soft-spoken
Cooperative	Ambitious[b]	Willing to have spouse make decisions
Ambitious	Obedient and yielding[b]	Self-sacrificial
Obedient and yielding	Offers help[b]	Emotional
Offers help	Gives frank criticism	Intuitive
Gives identity to spouse	Gives identity to spouse[b]	Concerned about physical appearance
Looks within for spiritual direction	Develops talents and uses them in church	Provides emotionally for family
Enjoys teaching adults in church	Dominant in the home	Submissive in the home
Focuses on relationships	Enjoys teaching adults in church[b]	Enjoys teaching children in church
Has marketable skills	Has marketable skills[b]	Has domestic skills
Makes home top priority	Makes home top priority[b]	Focuses on relationships[b]
	Sophisticated	Values others above self
		Makes home top priority[b]
		Sensitive and compassionate

[a] Only items receiving 75% or more endorsement by clergy in each respective group are listed.

[b] Items identified as the ideal adult spiritual health.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Between Clergy Perceptions of Spiritually Healthy Adults, Males and Females

Descriptor Items[a]	Adults (n = 27)		Males (n = 25)		Females (n = 25)		ANOVA		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	MS-Bet	MS-Err	F
Self-reliant	.74	.45	.76	.44	.24	.44	2.20	.19	11.37**
Comfortable leading in church	.81	.39	.96	.20	.24	.44	3.65	.13	28.11**
Holds strongly to beliefs	.78	.42	.96	.20	.40	.50	2.04	.16	13.01**
Independent	.85	.36	.84	.37	.36	.49	2.00	.17	11.79**
Aggressive	.88	.32	.96	.20	.28	.46	3.52	.12	30.09**
Ambitious	.89	.32	.88	.33	.48	.51	1.38	.16	8.86*
Submissive in the home[b]	.33	.48	.12	.33	.84	.37	3.43	.16	21.14**
Gives frank criticism	.59	.50	.84	.37	.32	.48	1.69	.21	8.17*
Gives identity to spouse	.81	.40	.84	.37	.32	.48	2.17	.17	12.49**
Provides financially	.59	.50	.64	.49	0.00	0.00	3.21	.17	19.35**
Enjoys teaching children in church	.19	.40	.08	.28	.72	.46	2.96	.15	20.03**
Has domestic skills	.07	.27	.12	.33	.80	.41	4.20	.11	36.56**
Gentle, soft-spoken	.33	.48	.40	.50	1.00	0.00	3.43	.16	21.14**
Spouse makes decisions	.33	.48	.40	.50	.84	.37	1.93	.21	9.30*
Fair and just	.59	.50	.72	.46	.16	.37	2.16	.20	10.73**
Seeks advice from others	.22	.42	.28	.46	.72	.46	1.89	.20	9.47*
Comfortable following in church	.11	.32	.08	.28	.76	.44	3.73	.12	30.41**
Willing to change beliefs	.22	.42	.08	.28	.56	.51	1.52	.17	8.90*
Dependent	.11	.32	.20	.41	.64	.49	2.05	.17	12.19**
Passive	.04	.19	0.00	0.00	.64	.49	3.26	.09	35.90**
Prefers the predictable	.15	.36	.12	.33	.56	.51	1.53	.16	9.29*
Not ambitious	.07	.27	.16	.37	.52	.51	1.43	.15	9.24*
Dominant in the home	.59	.50	.80	.41	.16	.37	2.67	.19	14.24**
Withholds criticism	.33	.48	.12	.33	.64	.49	1.71	.19	8.78*
Finds identity through spouse	.15	.36	.16	.37	.64	.48	2.00	.17	11.79**
Provides emotionally for family	.33	.48	.52	.51	1.00	0.00	3.04	.17	18.35**
Enjoys teaching adults in church	.74	.45	.96	.20	.24	.44	3.41	.15	23.60**
Has marketable skills	.81	.40	.88	.33	.16	.37	4.00	.14	29.40**
Forceful	.59	.50	.56	.51	0.00	0.00	2.82	.17	16.44**
Makes decisions for spouse	.63	.49	.60	.50	.12	.33	2.08	.20	10.29**
Sophisticated	.65	.49	.88	.34	.28	.46	2.22	.19	11.88**
Dispassionate	.68	.48	.64	.49	.12	.33	2.26	.19	12.05**

[a] Items which Tukey's test for post hoc analysis showed females differed significantly from both adults and males. No significant difference was found between adults and males on any item.

[b] Tukey's test for post hoc analysis showed a significant difference between females and males only.

*$p < .05$ Experiment-wise ($p < .001$ comparison-wise). **$p < .01$ Experiment-wise ($p < .0001$ comparison-wise).

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